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RETRO RACISM

Colonial Ignorance and Racialized Affective Consumption in Danish Public Culture

Abstract

Racial representations on commodities in Danish supermarkets have been the subject of heated public debates about race and racism in recent years. Through an analysis of a 2014 media debate about the so-called 'racist liquorice', the article suggests that the fight for the right to consume racialized products sheds light on how 'epistemologies of ignorance' of race and colonialism operate in Denmark. Focusing on how questions of history, memory and nationhood feature in the media texts, the article introduces the concepts of *retro racism* and *racialized affective consumption* to capture the affective and historical dynamics at play in debates on racism in Denmark. While the former term points to how racism becomes positioned as something always already retrograde in a Danish context, the latter relates to how a rhetoric of pleasure and enjoyment gets mobilized in the sustaining of a whitewashed image of Danish national community.

Keywords

Affective economies • colonial ignorance • commodification of otherness • political correctness • retro racism

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It's nice to know that when you sit down to enjoy a plate of strawberries, somebody got paid very little so that you could have your strawberries. It doesn't mean the strawberries will taste different, but it's nice to enjoy things less than we do. We enjoy things far too much, and it leads to incredible pain and suffering.

– Jamaica Kincaid (quoted in Berlin Snell 1997: n.p.)

Skipper Mix: The 'Racist Liquorice'

On the afternoon of 17 January 2014, the Danish tabloid newspaper *Ekstra Bladet* published a short article on its website titled 'Haribo fjerner racistiske lakridser' (Haribo Removes Racist Liquorice) (Harder 2014).¹ The article reported that the Swedish branch of the German confectionery company Haribo had agreed to change the design of one of the liquorice faces in their popular bag of sweets 'Skipper Mix' after having received complaints from customers who objected to the use of racist stereotypes in the design of the liquorice (Edström & Strömberg 2014; Harder 2014). 'It is important to listen to the customers', the Managing Director of Haribo Sweden was quoted as saying; a statement backed up by the Managing Director of Haribo Denmark, who confirmed that the liquorice face would be redesigned in the Danish version as well, as they produced the bag of sweets for the Nordic market (Harder 2014). But not all customers felt they had

been heard. The article included quotes from several people who strongly disagreed with Haribo's 'cowardly' decision to change the design of the liquorice and who called for a boycott of the company (ibid.).

Ekstra Bladet's article on the Skipper Mix case generated an immediate reader outcry: according to the newspaper's follow-up article, the story had been shared more than 11,000 times on Facebook and Twitter within hours (Selin 2014). This heated response to Haribo's decision to redesign the liquorice did not wane. Over the next two weeks, more than 40 articles, editorials and letter to the editors were published about the case in Danish tabloid, national and regional newspapers and online news media, with headlines such as 'Haribo Liquorice Accused of Racism!' (Jespersen & Pittelkow 2014a), 'Furious Danes Threaten to Boycott Haribo' (Lindevall 2014), 'Forbidden: Far Too Strong Liquorice' (Okstrøm 2014) and 'Racist Liquorice – and Crazy Swedes' (Dall 2014).

The Skipper Mix debate is one of several examples of how food products that feature racial representations in their design have become the centre of intense media debates on racism and representation across northern Europe over the past years (for debates in Germany, France and the Netherlands, see Hinrichsen, 2012; for Finland, see Rossi 2009; for Sweden, see Pripp & Öhlander 2012; Hübinette & Tigervall 2012; Hübinette 2014). In Danish supermarkets, many of these commodities can be found in aisles that stock the so-called 'kolonialvarer' (literally, 'colonial products'),

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an old term that covers products such as coffee, cocoa, spices, sugar and other preserved products originally imported from the former European colonies. While today these products seldom have direct connection to, for instance, the former Danish colonies in the Global South, the racialized imagery in their designs draw on the visual archive of colonial representation of racial difference (Pieterse 1992; McClintock 1995; Ciarlo 2011; Hinrichsen 2012). As such, the products are examples of what Sarah E. Chinn has termed 'racialized things': 'things that bear, communicate, and reproduce regimes of racialization even as that is not their sole or even primary purpose' (Chinn 2012: 874).

The Un-visibility of Racialized Things in Denmark

The Skipper Mix case has become a central reference point in the numerous ensuing debates on racialized things in Denmark, including the 2015 debates on the design of the packaging of the popular coffee 'Cirkel Kaffe' and the 'Africa land' section in the Danish theme park *Djurs Sommerland* (see Scherrebeck 2015; Kristensen 2015). In the following, I argue that the defence of this 'racist liquorice' is a fruitful site for considering how questions of racism and colonialism get conceptualized and negotiated in Danish public culture. While the media debates have been structured around the question of whether racialized things are racist or not, the framing of the question has usually ensured that the answer could only be dismissive. In the following, I argue against this tendency to presume that we can know in advance the effects of the presence of racial representations in commodity culture. Especially since the questions of why these racialized images are in use, and what role they perform, what aesthetic and political histories they draw on and reproduce, are seldom if ever brought up and discussed.

Debaters have repeatedly suggested that it is ridiculous to talk about racism in the face of something as presumably 'innocent', 'lovable' and 'trivial' as the visual design of a bag of sweets. But as the ever-growing marketing research industry reminds us, the packaging of commodities is never a trivial affair. The design is key to the 'personality' of commodities, which is central to the establishment and sustaining of the relationship between the product and the consumer – a relationship based on economy as well as desire (Manring 1998: 5). As Manring notes, 'The things we see and use every day – and even more to the point, ignore – tell us much about ourselves. They are, to use one of [James] Baldwin's phrases, "the evidence of things not seen"' (ibid.: 16). Manring calls attention to the importance of examining how habits and traditions of consumption have worked to make racialized things 'un-visible' in a Danish context, to borrow Ralph Ellison's term for presences that people refuse to see (Ellison 1981: xii). And it is precisely the normalized consumption of racialized things in Danish public culture that makes this an interesting site of engagement that raises questions about the relationship between the 'epistemologies of ignorance' of race and coloniality (Mills 1997; Sullivan & Tuana 2007) and 'quotidian racist practice' (Holland 2013) in the context of Danish and Nordic 'whiteness discourses' (Mulinari et al. 2009: 3-4).

The empirical material of this article is drawn from an extensive media archive on racism debates in Danish media between 2012 and 2016 that I have compiled in collaboration with Professor Lene Myong through Infomedia, a database that provides electronic full-text articles from all Danish newspapers and a number of other media platforms (see also Danbolt & Myong, forthcoming). The 45 articles

that are at the centre of my analysis were published between 17 January and 17 February of 2014. They span a range of genres from articles, editorials, commentaries and letters to the editors and were published mainly in tabloid papers and leading conservative national newspapers – in print and online – as well as regional papers that work in collaboration with national ones.²

In my analysis of the media texts in the Skipper Mix debate, I draw on discourse analysis and deconstructive reading strategies (Laclau & Mouffe 1985; Andersen 1999) in order to examine the 'affective economies' (Ahmed 2004a) at play when critiques of racism interrupt the pleasurable consumption of racialized things in Denmark. I introduce the term *retro racism* with a view to examining how questions of history, memory and nationhood feature in these texts and to analyze the affective dynamics that keep positioning racism as something always already retrograde, politically as well as historically, in a Danish context. This displacement of racism gains support, I argue, by the way racialized commodities are understood as part of an aestheticized retro culture. The collective attachment to racialized retro things manifests itself in practices I call *racialized affective consumption*. By drawing attention to the central role that consumption – buying as well as eating – plays in the affective work that racialized things perform in majoritized Danish domestic culture, I argue for the importance of examining the function of pleasure and taste in sustaining regimes of racialized differentiation.

Fighting Political Correctness: Saving Haribo's Skipper Mix

What does this so-called 'racist liquorice' actually look like? The design of the Skipper Mix bag has varied since its introduction on the Danish market in 1943. In 2014, when the debate started, the bag had a drawing of a white captain at sea. A transparent 'window' in the bag gives a peak of the goods 'inside' the captain's vessel, which is filled with black liquorice figures. Some are shaped like coins, with images of pistols and cannons, others are animal shaped, while the majority are in the form of mask-like heads with crude racial stereotypes, including an Asian 'coolie' face and several 'African' faces: a masculine head with large eyes, flat nose and big lips; a feminine head in profile with large protruding lips, earring and hair in bantu knots; and a childlike 'goliwog' head with frizzy hair, large lips and round eyes. (It was only the latter face that Haribo Denmark initially agreed to redesign.)³ Taken together, the Skipper Mix bag tells a story of a captain at sea with his merchandise or trophies. This is a story that happens to include figurations of all the central elements in the history of Denmark's involvement in the transatlantic enslavement trade – weapons, gold coins and black heads rendered in sugary liquorice. A story that is accompanied by the slogan, printed on the bag: 'Kids and grown-ups love it so, the happy world of Haribo.'

As mentioned, anger dominated the reports and comments on the Haribo case. But as the newspaper headlines cited above indicate, it was not the presence of racialized imagery in Danish commodity culture that caused the heated reactions. It was the 'ridiculousness' of the so-called 'accusation' of racism – and Haribo's choice to listen to this critique – that made this a newsworthy case. Of all the published texts on the Skipper Mix case, only one article included some context of the initial criticism in the form of quotes from Haribo's Facebook page, where two customers expressed their 'shock' at having realized that their favourite sweets sported 'caricatures of people of different origin' (quoted in Nielsen 2014).

But these points of critique were never elaborated or discussed in the articles, which instead centred on the financial and political effects of Haribo's decision. The experts invited to comment on the case were, therefore, not researchers on commodity aesthetics or racial representation but marketing professionals, who suggested that Haribo had made a big mistake by 'reacting to quickly' to the voices of a 'minority', with the result that the 'majority think they [Haribo] are moronic' (quoted in Mortensen 2014b).

While the reports on the boycott indicated the potential financial effects for Haribo, a number of editorials and articles sought to explain the broader political questions at stake in this debate. Casper Hjørt's editorial in the tabloid newspaper *BT* on 18 January 2014, 'Politisk korrekthed galt i halsen' (Political Correctness Hard to Swallow), is a case in point:

Racism is disgusting, but excessive political correctness is also intolerable. The liquorice faces that were introduced in 1943 are supposed to illustrate the souvenirs a well-travelled seafarer might bring home, but they are now being rejected. [...] Everyone who fights racism deserves praise, but those who simply pander to politically correct hysteria deserve to get sent a clear message – right to their face (Hjørt 2014: 4).

Hjørt framed the Skipper Mix case as an example of a larger political problem: the rise of 'excessive political correctness'. This framing relies on a distinction between racism 'proper' and 'hysterical' accusations of racism – a distinction that remains unexplicated because of the apparent obvious difference between the two. This 'politically correct hysteria' is furthermore presented as analogous to racism, and the analogy is efficient. It not only allows Hjørt to present himself – and the newspaper he speaks for – as actively fighting racism *through the act of disavowing* 'hysterical' accusations of racism, but also works to legitimize a shift of attention from the allegedly non-present racism to its equally dangerous and highly present sibling political correctness, here represented by 'antiracist' critics. Given that this political correct 'hysteria' is figured as *just as bad* as racism, it also warrants the same treatment: a clear message right to the face.

Jumping Scales: 'Hysteria and Hypocrisy'

The Skipper Mix debate follows a predictable script for what has been called the 'non-discussions' of racism in relation to cultural production in Danish media, where 'racism is always already presented as a nonsensical thing' and where the news stories start and end with a confirmation of the self-evident absurdity and irresponsibility of the critique itself (Myong et al. 2014). The shift of attention towards political correctness, which is framed as a threat similar to racism or even as a new form of racism itself, has become a well-established discourse in recent years in Denmark as well as other northern European countries (for Denmark, see Danbolt & Myong forthcoming; for Germany, see Sieg 2015; for Netherlands, see Wekker 2016). In Danish debates, the political culture in Sweden has repeatedly been figured as the symbolic centre of the rise of 'excessive political correctness', as the Skipper Mix debate demonstrates. The political investment in antiracist policies and rhetorics that marks Swedish mainstream culture (Hübner 2014) has frequently been reduced to an example of a destructive 'PC' culture in Danish debates. Sociologist Tina Bømler's article on the Haribo case, 'Fri os for hykleri og hysteri' (Free us from Hysteria and Hypocrisy), in *Nordjyske Stiftstidende* is an apt example of this. Bømler rails at what she mockingly terms 'the association of politically correct Swedes', who

'see apparitions in broad daylight': 'One would need to have a pretty good imagination in order to associate a confectionary product with racism. [...] This is hypocrisy and hysteria at the highest level. What next?' (Bømler 2014: 29). The Swedes' propensity to see racist 'apparitions' in the most 'innocent' things is here used to pathologize politically correct 'hysteria' – a disease that now appears to have arrived in Denmark. The effect of this threatening 'madness' is also a point of concern in political commentators Karen Jespersen's and Ralf Pittelkow's report on the Skipper Mix case on their rightwing online platform *Den Korte Avis*:

The story of the liquorice that is called racist is yet another tragicomic example of the Swedish elite's totally extreme political correctness and hate for their own culture and traditions [...] While the Swedes are busy prohibiting liquorice they call racist, Swedish society is undergoing dramatic changes. The political correctness has the scary consequence that one closes one's eyes to the mass immigration that is happening, and the problems that follow in its wake (Jespersen & Pittelkow 2014a).

Jespersen and Pittelkow see the Swedes' critique of the liquorice bag as an elitist, self-hating attack on Swedish national culture and heritage: an attack that works as a smokescreen that diverts attention away from the ongoing eradication of the Swedish nation state caused by mass immigration. In this framework, the Danish defence of Skipper Mix appears as a defence of Danish traditions and customs – and thus the nation – against threats from the outside.

Esben Lunde Larsen, Member of Parliament for the Liberal Party and former Minister of Higher Education and Science in the Danish government, presented the Skipper Mix case as an attack on freedom of expression. In a Facebook post quoted in the newspapers, Lunde Larsen expressed his anger at Haribo's decision: 'I have grown up with words such as "negro" and "Spaniard", which have been prohibited due to political correctness. Now, my favourite sweets have been prohibited...! What next?' (quoted in Dam 2014). This 'prohibition' prompted the politician to take action: 'In a self-initiated protest against political correctness I will use the words "negro" and "Spaniard" and eat Haribo's black piratos' (ibid.: Lunde Larsen 2014a).

Faced with protests like these, it might be worth asking: what is it that makes a confectionery company's decision to redesign their liquorice end up in a media controversy about issues including the political demise of Sweden, the dangers of political correctness, the problems of mass immigration and nostalgia for the times when one could say racist slurs without being criticized? The responses to the Skipper Mix case are paradoxical: on the one hand, the idea that sweets can be connected to racism is time and again seen as the epitome of 'idiocy' (Gaarslev 2014: 28), since the object in question is nothing but an 'innocent' old commodity. On the other hand, this 'innocent' commodity is important enough to get journalists, politicians, commentators and others to write texts and initiate protests in support of the product. The defence of Skipper Mix is in short characterized by dramatic jumps in arguments and scale: in the media, the critique of racist representation gets portrayed as a threatening accusation and demand for censorship, if not an outright 'prohibition'. And Haribo's decision to listen to the initial critique is seen as an evidence of how an 'extreme political correctness' is 'controlling' and 'tyrannizing' Danish society (Jespersen & Pittelkow 2014b).

But where is this 'mob of politically correct, condescending Danes who have taken control of public opinion', as Lunde Larsen puts it

(Lunde Larsen 2014b: 23)? This 'mob' can hardly be said to control the media in this case, as there are no published commentaries in mainstream media outlets that voice support for either the critique of racism or Haribo's decision to alter the design. Despite the widespread consensus in the media of the 'scandalous' nature of this erroneous 'accusation' of racism, the majority position frames itself as being under attack. The 'phantasmagoria of censorship' that runs through this debate not only works to cast antiracist critique as illegitimate (Bissenbakker et al. 2016), but it is also instrumental in producing and upholding an affective economy in which the imaginary antiracist critics are figured as hysterical – overemotional, irrational and all too easily offended – while critics of political correctness appear as rational, and properly national, subjects.

The Effects of Danish Racial Exceptionalism

How are we to understand this distribution and attribution of affects that makes the idea of criticizing racism appear irrational? One way to answer this is to read the Skipper Mix case in relation to the available conceptual repertoires for understanding racism in a Danish context. The media commentators' frequent invocation of the difference between racism 'proper' and the allegedly irrational 'accusations' of racism must be understood in the context of how a narrative of racial exceptionalism has shaped the meaning of the term in a Danish and Nordic context (Goldberg 2006; Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2012). According to this narrative of racial exceptionalism, racism is a term reserved to describe acts of discrimination based on a belief in the biological difference and inferiority of people of other 'races' – an ideological framework associated with historical episodes such as plantation slavery in the United States, the apartheid regime in South Africa and the eugenic project of the Nazis. This restricted biological and intentionalist conceptualization of racism has – together with the long tradition of silencing and disavowing the Nordic countries' colonial involvements and 'colonial complicities' (Keskinen et al. 2009; Andreassen & Vitus 2015), as well as these countries' investment in eugenic social projects far beyond World War II – supported a narrative in which racism 'proper' is understood as something that primarily 'exists "far away", "in the past", or "on the extreme right wing"' in a Nordic context (Myong 2014: n.p.). The idea of Nordic racial exceptionalism has thus been central to the ideational branding of the region's unprecedented understanding of equality, tolerance and solidarity (Gullestad 2005; Blaagaard & Andreassen 2012; Habel 2012; Hübinette 2014; Keskinen et al. 2009; Myong 2014; Danbolt 2016). The image of Nordic historical innocence and contemporary investment in equality has worked to foster what Ylva Habel terms 'sanctioned ignorance' regarding racialized marginalization and racism in a Nordic context (Habel 2012: 104). This ignorance has nurtured a culture of 'normative colour blindness', in which the avoidance of 'seeing' and verbalizing racialized signs, such as skin colour, has been seen as an antiracist strategy that turn race into a meaningless category (ibid.: Andreassen, Folke Henningsen & Myong 2008). Despite its often declared good intentions, this culture of 'racial silence', as Myong terms it (2009), has worked to obscure the ways in which race continues to operate as a biopolitical medium that (re)produces frames for understanding bodily difference. Furthermore, the normative culture of racial silence in Denmark works to ensure that those who criticize racism appear as the ones who introduce race into the conversation. By pointing to the problem, one gets framed as the producer of the problem, and thus one becomes the problem (Ahmed 2010).

Within the context of a racial silence that recognizes incidents of racism as exceptional and anachronistic interruptions in an allegedly 'non-racist' culture, it is no surprise that the news of a 'racist sweet' gets framed as an absurd, hysterical and unintelligible non-event. Yet the Skipper Mix debate also reflects a shift in the 'racial regionalization' (Goldberg 2006) of the narrative of Nordic racial exceptionalism. The positioning of Sweden as the antithesis to Denmark that runs through the debate supports Myong's recent argument concerning the ongoing recalibration of the Danish narrative of racial exceptionalism in ways that break with the idea of a Nordic common ground (Myong 2014). The Haribo case is but one example of how the image of Danish tolerance and openness no longer primarily gets constituted in comparison to the 'real' racism in the United States or South Africa. Instead the Danish difference is set in contrast to the politically correct 'racist antiracism' in Sweden. In recent Danish media debates on racism, Sweden keeps being figured as the fearful spectre that, in Myong's words, 'awaits in the future, if "we" fail to remain careful and choose a different strategy for the Danish society', while simultaneously being positioned as a 'backward society that has not reached the same prestigious level of development as Denmark, where immigration can be discussed without filter and prejudice' (ibid.). The Skipper Mix debate exhibits with great clarity how the 'grumpy' Swedes, as they keep being labelled (Lunde Larsen 2014b; Bømler 2014; Mortensen 2014a), function as an efficient Other in the refurbishment of Danish racial exceptionalism.

Entitlement Racism: The Circumscription of 'Freedom' and 'Rights'

The idea of 'the Swedish illness' (Hartmann 2014: 23), which threatens to ruin not only the happiness of the Danes but also the Danish investment in freedom of expression, is central to the way political *incorrectness* gets presented as an important political strategy in the Skipper Mix debate. This is at play in the politician Lunde Larsen's personal campaign of using the 'n-word', as well as in his public summoning to collective action in a newspaper article:

Let us come together and fill our shopping trolleys with Skipper Mix, oranges from Israel, eggs from battery hens, and other politically incorrect products this Saturday, and thereby fight the political correctness that assaults freedom of expression and common sense in every way (Lunde Larsen 2014b: 23).

In contrast to the customers and critics who called for a boycott of Haribo, Lunde Larsen positions excessive consumption of 'politically incorrect products' as an act of resistance. Freedom of expression is not only figured here as freedom of consumption but also as freedom to perform acts that can be understood as problematic or racist. Lunde Larsen's 'protest' stands as an example of the rise of what Aaron James has termed the 'entitlement culture' of neoliberal capitalism, where the enlargement of one's freedom to have and act gets figured as a moral right, independent of its social cost for others (James 2012). Philomena Essed builds on James' work when theorizing how the relational aspects of freedom are undermined in what she calls 'entitlement racism': 'racism legitimised in terms of rights, more particularly, the right of freedom of expression' (Essed 2013: 62). Essed's analyses of the ascendance of blunt, careless and shameless invocations of the 'right to offend in the name of freedom' can be seen as a precise description of Lunde Larsen's intervention

in the debate (ibid.: 74). His call for collective actions of 'political incorrectness' further demonstrates that although entitlement racism is grounded in a highly individualistic conception of freedom, it can also be used to summon a public that come together in the act of offending others.

The explicitness of Lunde Larsen's entitlement-racist agenda stands out in the debate. And although he was criticized for his outbursts, the criticism merely centred on how one would expect a 'more elegant attack on the absurdities' at play in Sweden from an 'intellectual like him' (Egelund 2015: 56). The thrust of his entitlement-racist agenda, and his alignment of political action with consumer action, echoes throughout the debate. This is evident in Hjort's editorial in *B7*, where, in reference to the boycott campaign, he makes clear that 'the only positive thing in the present case is that it shows how consumers are increasingly able to use their leverage against large corporations' (Hjort 2014: 4). Hjort's comments highlight another aspect of the circumscribed concept of freedom at play in the culture of 'entitlement capitalism': that the majority of customers' 'right to consume' trumps everything – even the producers' right to change or redesign their own commodities.

Nostalgia for a Time 'Before' Racism

What is it about Skipper Mix that makes so many people demand their right to consume it in an unaltered form? Fear of change runs through the articles in the debate, in particular fear of changes in habitual patterns of consumption and pleasure. This is evident in the ways in which 'history' is used to legitimize the object's design or explain its value as national cultural heritage. In these invocations of 'history', we see how the entwined discourses of innocence and ignorance pertaining to racism and colonialism in a Danish context work to bolster an entitlement-capitalist sense of the right to pleasure. Take for instance Nelly Hagen's invocation of Danish history in her defence of Skipper Mix in an article in the newspaper *Dagbladet Køge*:

Denmark has always been a nation of sailors. We are proud of our old traditions and our sailors. Skipper Mix was probably made in honour of these sailors. [...] [T]hese fun heads spark kids' imagination. One can dream of the big world and its manifold people (Hagen 2014: 10).

Hagen is not alone in presenting Skipper Mix as a pedagogical tool that has been teaching kids about Danish history as well as the different peoples of the world for over half a century (see, e.g. Petersen 2014: 14). For Hagen, the liquorice bag signals a collective pride in Denmark as a historical nation of seafarers. That this history also includes active involvement in the transatlantic enslavement trade – a story the visual design of the Skipper Mix bag can be seen to connote – is conspicuously excluded from this view.

The fact that Skipper Mix is an old product is often used as an argument when critics seek to underline the innocence of the commodity. We see this in commentaries by researchers such as Bømler, who explains that: 'There was a time when the Danes ate negro buns [chocolate-covered cream puffs] without thinking it was racist. Now that has been prohibited. [...] Skipper Mix has been produced since 1943, without anyone ever having been offended' (Bømler 2014: 29). This yearning for a past where no one was 'thinking it was racist' is also at play in Lunde Larsen's reference to his childhood when a chocolate-covered cream puff 'could be

called a "negro kiss"' and when Skipper Mix and 'cartoons such as *Tintin in the Congo* were not yet lambasted for being racist' (Lunde Larsen 2014b: 23). The Skipper Mix debate includes a number of such nostalgic narratives of childhood consumption of racialized things (see Egelund 2014: 56). These narratives profess a longing for a fictitious time 'before' racism – that is, for the time when racism was so normalized and naturalized that racial representations did not figure as objects of critique. By recasting the past as untouched by racism in this way, the debaters are able to present antiracist critics as the ones who now 'introduce' racism to Denmark with their so-called antiracist 'racist thinking'.

In an editorial in the newspaper *Århus Stiftstidende*, Hans Petersen turns this nostalgia for a time 'before' racism into a historical argument by connecting it to juridical discourse:

In court one operates with the principle of precedent. If something has existed long enough or has been used sufficiently often, the frequent use can overrule all other arguments. There is a precedent for it being so. It has become a habit. We are certainly allowed to understand the liquorice figures in a similar manner. None of us would probably even dream that we are belittling black people by eating these figures. The head of the chief, the king, sailor, or whatever it is supposed to be, has been a part of Haribo's Skipper Mix for so many years that there is a precedent for his existence. We do not mean any harm by it (Petersen 2014: 14).

Petersen's comment spells out the line of reasoning in many of the 'historical' defences of Skipper Mix, in which the reference to the object's historicity is used to demonstrate its innocence. According to this circular logic, habits and traditions are legitimate – no matter their content, context or effects – merely because they have become normalized and naturalized. In the context of Skipper Mix, then, the fact that the object allegedly was not *seen as racist* 'before' makes the *current* criticism of Skipper Mix not only unprecedented but also illegitimate.

Retro Racism

This temporal logic is central to the logic of *retro racism* that frames the Skipper Mix debate. With this term, I seek to highlight the 'historical' displacement of racism, in which racism is figured as *retrospectively* inscribed by 'antiracist' critics: a retrospective inscription that demonstrates that the criticism of racism is obviously a *retrograde* move, historically and politically. This logic efficiently secures that the critique of racism appears as always already anachronistic: too late to rupture the historical precedent that has established the object's innocence in the past and too late to question the potential racist effects *now*, given the object's historical character as a naturalized part of Danish tradition. Besides pointing to the temporal displacement of racism, I also use this phrase to highlight how the support of commodities such as Skipper Mix finds legitimacy in the conceptualizations of history that inform the burgeoning discourses of retro culture today. Retro culture describes the practices of reviving and refashioning cultural objects, especially from the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, in the present (Guffey 2006). In this process of cultural revival, it is the 'aesthetic and symbolic value rather than representational meaning' of the objects that are central (Handberg 2014: 75), a shift in emphasis that has made cultural theorists describe retro as a distinctly 'non-historical

way of knowing the past' (Guffey 2006: 20). As a growing part of everyday popular culture in the West, retro culture's emphasis on *presence over meaning* is central to its emotional and aestheticized use of the past. According to Kristian Handberg, retro objects contribute to the production of 'cultural memory': 'a performance of the cultural thickening of belonging in modern, material culture' that partakes in the process of producing 'a shared past' (ibid.: 81, 85). In the media debate, Skipper Mix gets cast and treated as a retro object that is simultaneously *historical* and *timeless*: historical in so far as it is used to construct an image of an innocent Danish past when race did not matter and timeless as this idealized image gets transformed into an idea of Danish innocence across time and space. In short, Skipper Mix's retro effect rewires the signifying chains of the image-object in a way that makes its representational connotations to Danish colonialism and the enslavement trade *un-visible*. Instead, the bag becomes a beacon for happy feelings of national (be)longing. The insistent repetition of this resignificatory gesture not only makes this racialized thing 'sticky' with positive affects, to borrow Sara Ahmed's term (Ahmed 2004b) but also efficiently blocks out alternative interpretations that threaten to besmear the sweetness of Skipper Mix with the 'negativity' of colonialism and racism. While the logic of retro racism does not purport to make racism itself fashionable, it does work to refashion the present understandings of racism by contributing to pedagogies of racial and colonial ignorance. In other words, the privileging of *presence over meaning* in the conceptualization of Skipper Mix in the debate suggests that the relational dynamics of retro culture can contribute to the naturalization and normalization of racist and nationalist logics.

The rhetoric of desire and pleasure that characterizes the descriptions of Skipper Mix in the debate can be said to function as a defence mechanism that aims to ensure that the racialized thing remains within a positive frame of reference, distanced from unpalatable histories of racism, colonialism and slavery. While this may ensure that the image-object's racist and colonial *connotations* remain *un-visible*, it does not mean that the racial representations themselves go unseen. The references to how the black liquorice heads in the Skipper Mix bag have functioned as desirable objects of pedagogy, fantasy and pleasure for Danish kids and adults for decades are reminders of this. This use of racial representations as 'resources of pleasure' finds support in the long-standing traditions of what bell hooks has termed the 'commodification of Otherness' in Western white supremacist cultures (hooks 1992: 21). In the seminal article 'Eating the Other', hooks examines how racial and ethnic stereotypes in US American commodity culture are used as 'seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture' (ibid.). The commodification of racial difference constitutes, in hooks' terms, 'an alternative playground' where majoritarian subjects can 'affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other' (ibid.: 23). Research on histories of advertising in northern Europe has shown how the commodification of the Other in advertisements, product design and consumer spectacles have been central to the institutionalization and maintenance of ideas of racial difference across Europe as well (Pieterse 1992; McClintock 1995; Zeller 2010; Ciarlo 2011; Hinrichsen 2012; Andreassen 2015). While an in-depth framing of Skipper Mix within a Danish history of commodity racism is beyond the scope of this article, I concur with Zeller's argument that it is precisely the subtlety of what he terms the 'visual racism' in commodity culture that has made this such an effective arena for trivializing colonial histories and structures – and their enduring effects (Zeller 2010: 78).

The frequent presentation of the Skipper Mix liquorice bag as an object of pedagogy and pleasure suggests that racialized things are

still expected to perform a particular kind of affective work aligned with the long racialized history of 'black labor and white leisure', to use Manning's suggestive phrase (Manning 1998: 11). If we return to the tagline used in the marketing of Skipper Mix – 'kids and adults love it so, the happy world of Haribo' – we might ask: for whom is this a happy world?

Happy Objects and Racialized Affective Consumption

The fight to ensure that Skipper Mix remains and retains its function as an object of pleasure points to how the commodity works as what Sara Ahmed would term a 'happy object' (Ahmed 2010). Ahmed's concept describes the circuitous logics at play in the attribution of happiness to particular things: an attribution that makes happiness appear as the thing that follows from being in proximity to the object: 'To be affected in a good way by objects that are already evaluated as good is a way of belonging to an affective community. We align ourselves with others by investing in the same objects as the cause of happiness' (ibid.: 38). In the media debate, Skipper Mix gets figured as a shared object that partakes in the production of a national affective community. The refusal to align oneself with the affective orientation towards these racialized things makes one appear as an 'affect alien' in Ahmed's terms, which covers the alienating experience of being 'out of line with an affective community' as well as the experience of being configured as an outsider or a stranger – a 'grumpy' Swede – that threatens the cohesion of the national community (ibid.: 37). In the debate, then, Skipper Mix takes on the role as 'social goods' in all senses of the term: a form of goods central to maintaining a whitewashed Danish sociality, past and present, as well as an emblem of certain peoples' *right to feel good* in the social act of consumption. I read this orientation towards the collective attachment to racialized things such as Skipper Mix as a form of *racialized affective consumption*. This phrase seeks to capture the investment in sustaining an affective economy that ensures that racialized things will continue to deliver positive and happy experiences of consumption for the consumer. The processes of racialization I am describing here is not only focused on how the consumption of racialized things contribute to the 'commodification of Otherness' in hooks' terms (hooks 1992). I suggest that the insistent framing of the consumption of racialized things in a language of happiness, desire and nostalgia also contributes to the racialization of the Danes as an imagined community of consumers who are always already 'beyond' and 'above' questions of race and colonialism.

The term *racialized affective consumption* seeks in short to shift the interpretive orientation from solely focusing on what racial representations do to those represented, to analyzing how racialized things affects and 'objectifies' those who consume them. Drawing on Daniel Miller's dialectical theory of objectification, which captures the dynamic processes in which 'objects make us' as much as 'we make them' (Miller 2010: 60), I argue that the insistent fight for the right to consume racialized things partake in the quotidian (re)making of an imagined national community that is (un)marked as homogeneously white.

Sharon Patricia Holland's recent suggestion in *The Erotic Life of Racism* to examine desire, pleasure and love not only as forces that 'conflict with the present order' but also as possible 'harbinger[s] of the established order' is relevant in this regard (Holland 2012: 9). In the Skipper Mix debate, we see how positive affects and feelings work to naturalize and legitimize what Holland terms 'quotidian

racist practice' in ways that demonstrate how racism can unfold as a 'project of belonging' in terms of affective identification with an imagined national community (ibid.: 3).

Conclusion

One of the core elements in the Skipper Mix case, besides the rhetorical skirmishes around the threatening phantasmagoria of antiracist 'censorship' and 'prohibition', is the fight for the unquestionable right to pleasure and enjoyment. In the media, critics work hard to give the realm of pleasurable consumption a certain form of autonomy from politics as well as from history, so that the comfortable habits of consumption can continue. Within the debate's framework of neoliberal capitalism, the figure of the 'antiracist' critic appears not only as a disturbing 'killjoy' who seeks to ruin the pleasures of others but also as a threat to democracy, given that he or she is seen to impose censorship upon what gets framed as a 'right' to enjoyment. But is enjoyment a right? For whom? And how?

'We enjoy things far too much and it leads to incredible pain and suffering', author Jamaica Kincaid notes in an interview (cited in Berlin Snell 1997: n.p.). Kincaid's comments point to how capitalist commodity fetishism, which works to sever the ties between an object and its histories of production and circulation, functions to normalize epistemologies of ignorance regarding racialized labour in a globalized world. By suggesting that 'it's nice to enjoy things less than we do', Kincaid calls on us to analyze how habitual forms of consumption and pleasure risk sustaining and reproducing hierarchical power structures related to gender, sexuality, race and class. Kincaid's reminder of how the pleasures of some often depend on the pain and suffering of others not only reads as a call to interrogate the 'erotic life of racism', in Holland's suggestive phrase (Holland 2012), but also the affective politics that allow pleasure and enjoyment to appear as autonomous entities untethered from historical and political power struggles. It is not surprising that people get defensive when confronted with criticism that disturbs habitual patterns of consumption and enjoyment. And it is not surprising that the reactions get heated when the criticism is directed at collectively cherished 'happy objects' that have been in vernacular use to invoke national affective communities for decades. The Skipper Mix case demonstrates the importance of disrupting the epistemologies of ignorance pertaining to race and colonialism which in a Danish context are partly sustained through the affective dynamics of pleasure and comfort. The anger and fear

of change that inform the media debate also suggest that there is a need to develop alternative pedagogies of emotional receptivity to broaden the understanding and exchanges surrounding the conflicting histories and historicities of pleasure and pain, desire and consumption that shape the sense of the present.

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Notes

1. All titles and quotes from Danish are translated by the author.
2. I have limited references to discussions on social media platforms, except when referenced in the printed media texts, as the discourses developed in the variegated semi-public cultures on social media demand different archival, methodological and analytical approaches that remain beyond the scope of this article.
3. In the end, Haribo redesigned several of the figures in the Skipper Mix bag. In the new design, the heads are now supposed to look more like 'cartoon drawings', as Haribo's marketing director explained it, with 'faces from Europe, Asia, Africa and South America, both men and women, so it will be more diversified' (see Nøhr 2015).

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